

B V

4255

B 85



15



Class BV4255

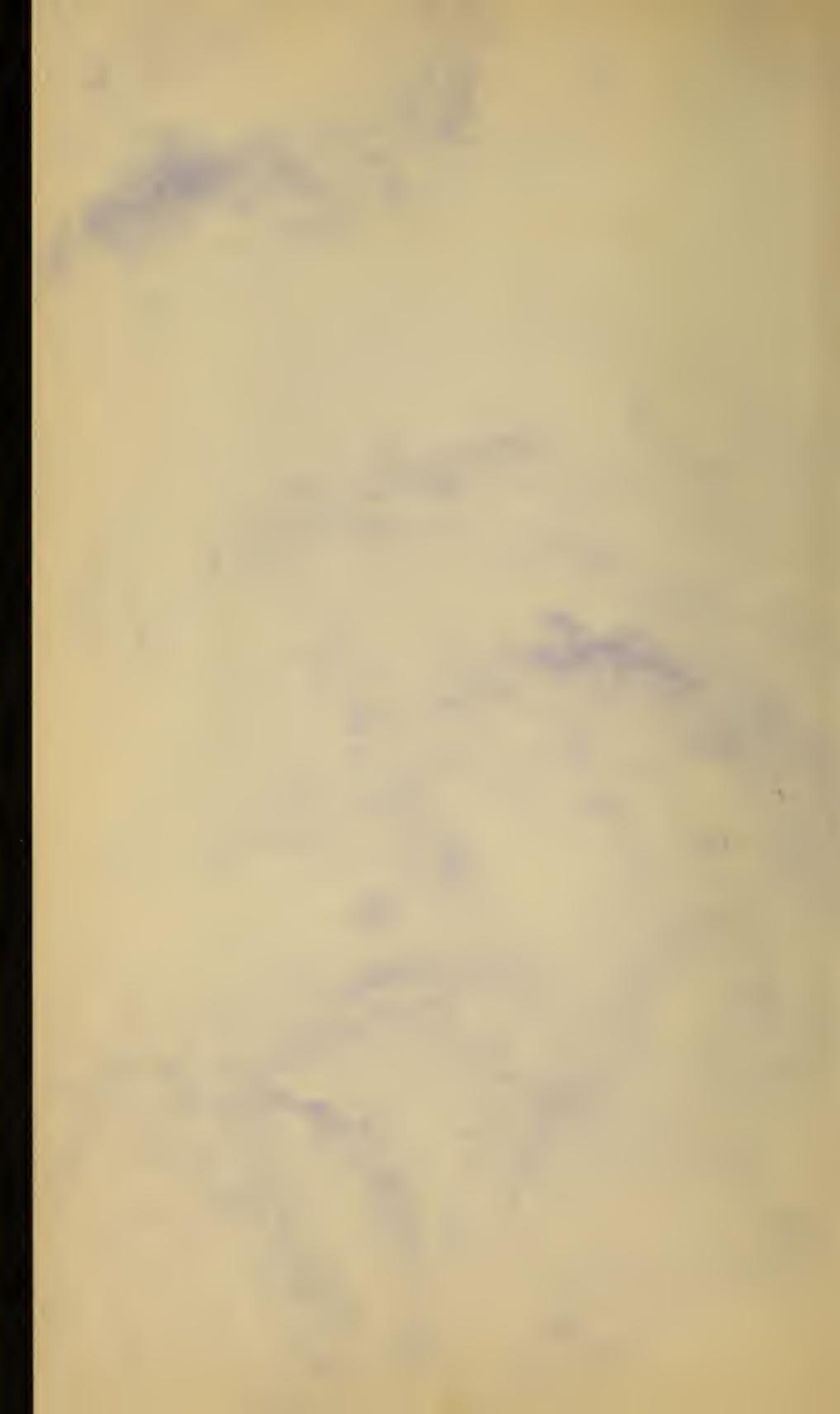
Book B 85

Copyright N° \_\_\_\_\_

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

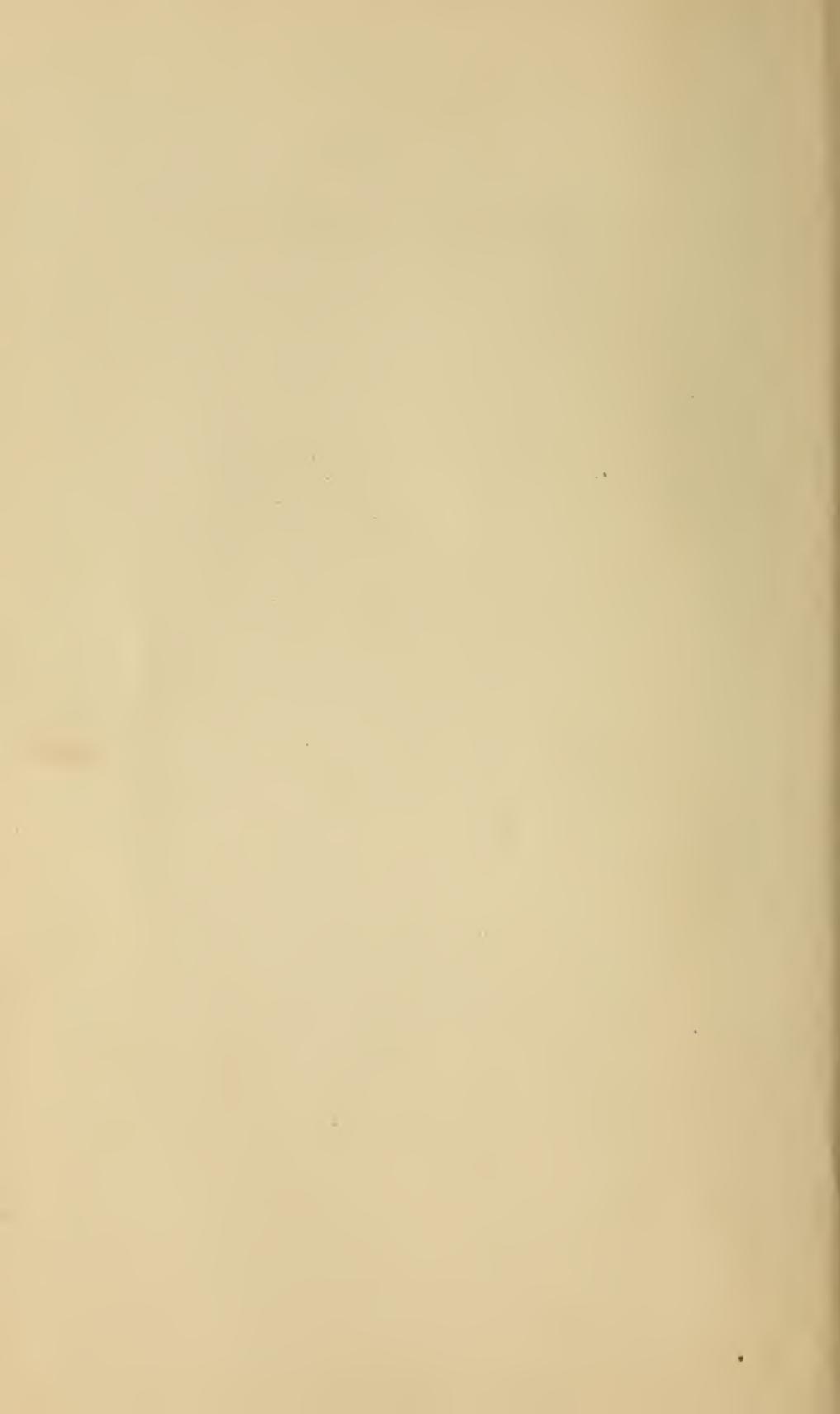
*HUMANUM CAPAX DIVINI*

*We are children of God, and if children  
then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs  
with Christ.*



ON BEING DIVINE





# ON BEING DIVINE

A BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

BY

MARION LE ROY BURTON

PRESIDENT OF SMITH COLLEGE



THE PILGRIM PRESS  
BOSTON CHICAGO

BV4255  
B85

COPYRIGHT 1916  
BY FRANK M. SHELDON

\$1.50

NOV 27 1916

THE PILGRIM PRESS  
BOSTON

© CLA 446614

20.1.

TO  
THE CLASS OF 1916  
AT SMITH COLLEGE



ON BEING DIVINE

*I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you  
are children of the Most High.*

PSALM 82:6

## ON BEING DIVINE

To speak upon the subject of being divine may seem at first thought bold and presumptuous, if not irreverent. Certainly the idea that man is divine is quite contradictory to many of our old theories of human nature and is scarcely sustained by the present relations existing between the peoples of Europe.

Even so the essential truth of our theme is amply attested by Scripture and is a central tenet in the teachings of Jesus Christ. He taught us to say "our Father." It is not a metaphysical assumption which denies our limitations but the confident assertion of our rich possibilities as sons of God. "*Humanum capax divini.*" In reality it is the fearless proclamation of the modern interpretation of Jesus' estimate of man.

What are the marks of a child of God? Reverently we may ask, What is it to be divine? What does it involve to accept in actual living Jesus' appraisal of a human being?

## I BE YOURSELF

First of all, it involves being yourself and insisting upon living your own life. Obviously to be yourself means to be your best self. As a child of God you have purposes and aspirations. You have a world of values dependent upon the things of the spirit. Being divine means being yourself at your best, for all that is finest in you is of God.

The world, however, seems engaged in a conspiracy to crush the individual. Democracy would justify the tyranny of the majority. Our age in its splendid emphasis upon social obligations appears to argue against individuality. A due regard for the past and a worthy reverence for our elders counsels conservatism, which is often simply being what others have been. Public opinion, established custom, even fashion, demand strict conformity to conventionalities. A practical age seems to confer its chief blessings upon the per-

son who can compromise his ideals, that is to say, who can fail to be himself. The subtle lure of our complex civilization tends to rob us of strong and virile personalities. The present war disregards utterly the worth of each man. Without failing to recognize the essential truths in all these mighty forces we must realize keenly that they are making an unwarranted demand when personal integrity and independence are sacrificed.

It is of value to observe that Jesus dared to be himself. It is one of the clear evidences of his divinity. The essential fact at the heart of the temptation of Jesus is that he insisted upon living his own life. The same principle finds constant expression in his later ministry. He not only refused to be made king but "when the days were well nigh come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem." He was forced to pay a terrible cost for clinging so tenaciously to his inner purpose. It brought misunderstanding, opposition, suffering and death. But Jesus was helping us to see what it is to be divine.

Being yourself, then, assumes a new significance. Naturally it does not mean being undemocratic or unsocial. Surely it does not require one to be unreasonable, or dogmatic, or stubborn, or blind to any of the worthy relationships of life. But it does call for independence, clear vision, inner certainty, loyalty to ideals and a complete identification of yourself with your principles. It involves for us, as it did for Jesus, fearful struggles and bitter experiences. It requires every person to guard his own life as a holy and inviolable gift of God. There come crises in every life when no other person, neither employer nor associate, nor friend nor lover, nor brother nor sister, nor father nor mother, nor husband nor wife, nor any agency nor power, can venture to decide for you or to presume upon you. In such an hour to be divine compels you instinctively to arise and say, "I must be myself."

"This above all,—to thine own self be true;  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

## II

### BE AN HEIR OF GOD

There are fatal dangers in trying to be yourself even at your best. It gives a false emphasis to life. Conceit and narrowness are almost inevitable by-products. Self is not primary. A self-centered world is not a real world. Standards lack objectivity, and life is not social. One is deprived of the strength and inspiration found alone in the great objective, independent order of the world.

Being divine is being a child of God. The apostle Paul formulated this truth when he wrote to the Romans that "we are children of God; and if children then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." To be an heir of God shifts the emphasis instantly from yourself to God. It means that we are living in filial relationship with the Father, that we are his kindred, his offspring, and inherit by nature his character and purposes. It implies that we are his representatives among

men, and that his cause is our cause. At heart, it requires of us as worthy children that we make God's will our will, that we lose ourselves in the consciousness of being God's ambassadors.

How illuminating it is to test this principle by the life of Christ. Above everything else he conceived himself to be his Father's representative. This is the unique impression which he made upon everyone. His supreme aim was to do the Father's will. "Nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt" was the prayer which summarized his life. He even asserts his oneness with God and declares without hesitation that "all things have been delivered" unto him of his Father. His constant purpose was to express God. For this reason he attacked sin, preached the Kingdom and was willing to die for his cause. All that he taught, or did, or was, came from his Father. He dared to be himself just because he was a child of God.

We, too, can live our own lives only as we claim our heritage as joint-heirs with Christ. Being an heir of God

will solve for us many perplexing questions. It will define our attitude to ourselves. From one point of view it will overwhelm us with a profound sense of humility. It will not be mere self-distrust, or self-depreciation, or lack of confidence in our abilities and powers. It will be rather the strong conviction that self is of value only as it expresses God. From another point of view it will endow us with an astounding consciousness of authority and innate worth. This sense of power will not be synonymous with self-sufficiency, or conceit, or pride of talent, or narrow-minded dogmatism. It will be the authority of one who is representing God. Jesus Christ impressed the world both with his humility and with his power. Of him they said that he taught them as one having authority. The secret of his life lay in his certainty of the Father, and his matchless devotion to the Father's will. By the same method and by that alone can we be children of the Most High.

This truth has been formulated very clearly by Mr. Ruskin. In speaking of such men as Albert Dürer and Sir

Isaac Newton he said: "They have a curious undersense of powerlessness, feeling that the power is not *in* them, but *through* them, that they could not do or be anything else than God made them, and they see something divine and God-made in every other man they meet, and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful." In reality, God provides the dynamic for being ourselves. Paradoxical as it may sound, we can only be ourselves by being heirs of God.

### III

## BE A CREATOR

True purpose must result in worthy action. Emerson said, "All men stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our secret." If we are heirs of God we must be at work. Christ taught this truth most emphatically in the great Mountain Sermon. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. By their fruits ye shall know them. Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." Even as a boy Jesus exemplified this truth. To his anxious parents who found him in the temple he said: "How is it that ye sought me. Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" At one time he told his disciples that his very sustenance was to do the will of him that sent him and to accomplish his work.

Moreover Christ was an original,

creative thinker and worker. His uniqueness consists not only in his daring to be himself, not in his conscious union with God, but also in his being deliberately and intentionally an innovator. He came not to destroy but to fulfill. Specific illustrations of this policy abound in the life of Christ. He violated social standards. He was a friend of publicans and sinners. He acted repeatedly on principles which defied the established law. He healed on the Sabbath day and disregarded their distinctions of ceremonial cleanliness and uncleanness. He did not hesitate to attack the religious aristocracy of his day nor to uproot the legalized forms of graft which had grown up in the temple. Jesus did not do these things just to be an innovator. He did them because the realities of life demanded them. He was independent of the past. Truth for him knew no time distinctions. He was capable of thinking in new terms and of devising new methods of work. He was essentially a creator.

The world today is in need of creators, who, daring to be true to their

best and aiming to be God's agents, are forced by some inner compulsion to grapple with our evils and to discover the remedies which will correct them. Every problem is a call for a creator. Social injustice, special privileges, political evils, industrial wrongs, educational inefficiency, international misunderstandings are the voice of God pleading with his heirs to be creative, constructive workers in his world.

Life itself demands creators. It is not static. Nothing abides. Change alone is permanent. Every hour brings new issues. In every realm of human activity there exists the demand for the inventive, discovering spirit of the sons of God.

Being divine, then, calls us to express our inner purposes by being creators, by co-operating with God in making his world and in establishing his Kingdom. It gives us a great and worthy cause demanding all the creative energy which we possess. It compels us to grow and to develop with a changing, evolving world. To be divine means work,—hard, painstaking, severe, continuous toil. This is the cru-

cial test to which life will put our divinity. It is the attribute of God himself. When the Jews persecuted Jesus because he healed a man on the Sabbath day, he simply announced to them: "My father worketh even until now and I work." Every heir of God must abound in the work of the Lord.

## IV

### BE A SAVIOR

Being divine is being something more than any of the things we have been discussing. In a sense to be divine is to be infinite and eternal. It is a thing of the spirit, defying analysis and statement. Is it possible for us to catch even faintly this spirit which pervades the very idea of divinity? Perhaps by approaching it from several points of view and then by recognizing that all these elements combine to produce one great stupendous truth we shall come as near as possible to the realization of our aim.

To be divine is to be possessed of a spirit which permeates all that one does or thinks or dreams. It must be the reality to which the Apostle Paul alluded when he spoke of "the glorious liberty of the children of God." It brings serenity in the midst of storm and trustfulness in the presence of uncertainty. It creates unconquerable hope when enemies assail and mighty

forces of opposition are aroused. It is the certainty of ultimate triumph whatever the present hour may hold of defeat, or dismay, or even death. This characteristic of Jesus was never shown more dramatically than when, on the eve of his crucifixion as a base criminal, he sat down with his disciples and prophetically established a symbolic memorial of his death, in absolute assurance of his coming victory. "Verily I say unto you, I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God." To be divine is to be marvellously, incredibly confident.

"The year's at the spring,  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill-side's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn;  
God's in His heaven—  
All's right with the world!"

To be divine is to love. "I say unto you love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil

and the good and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." It is a love which recognizes no barriers of color, creed or nationality. It knows that all men are children of the Father, that all mankind is divine. Above all it is a forgiving love. The prodigal was "no more worthy to be called a son," but nothing could rob him of his potential sonship. When he arose and went to his father, he was welcomed. Probably Jesus taught no newer or stranger truth than a love which included unlimited forgiveness. To be divine is to know that love never faileth.

But love in a world of sin means inevitably that the lover must suffer. In proportion as love is deep and genuine, suffering will be bitter and intense. This is the meaning of the cross of Christ. This is the very center of our thought of God. He carries in his heart an eternal cross of woe, because his children have wandered into a far country. To be divine is to suffer. The reality of our divine life may be measured by our suffering both for our own sin, and, more particularly, for that of society. We are "heirs of God

and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him."

At heart to be divine is to be a savior. Confidence in the ultimate victory of good, love for all mankind, suffering in the presence of evil are the elements of saviorhood. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. His great Father heart was yearning to save the children of his Kingdom. Being divine is in the last analysis the giving of ourselves for the saving of the world. "Saving" here means making bad men good, filthy cities clean, corrupt politics pure, selfish business honest, and unjust social conditions righteous. Solemn responsibilities inhere in divinity. We must be ourselves at our best, we must be heirs of God, we must be creators at work with the Father, in order to save the world and to establish his Kingdom. To whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required. We must help all mankind to claim its birthright. To be potentially divine is to be supremely human.

## ADDRESS TO THE CLASS

And now, members of the graduating class, I have said ye are gods and all of you are children of the Most High. If any one of you doubts this staggering assertion I wish you could look into your father's and your mother's heart. They know that you are a child of God. Each of you possesses a mystic charm for a parent's heart. It was not easy for them that day when you took the train to go to college for the first time. They were willing to give you up because they had great expectations for you. They sent you here because they wanted you to find yourself, to acquire the ability to get on independently, to develop a sense of responsibility, to deepen your appreciation of fine things and to establish your world of values and judgments.

As the years have come and gone they have wondered how college life was actually going with you, how you were fitting into a new world, and how

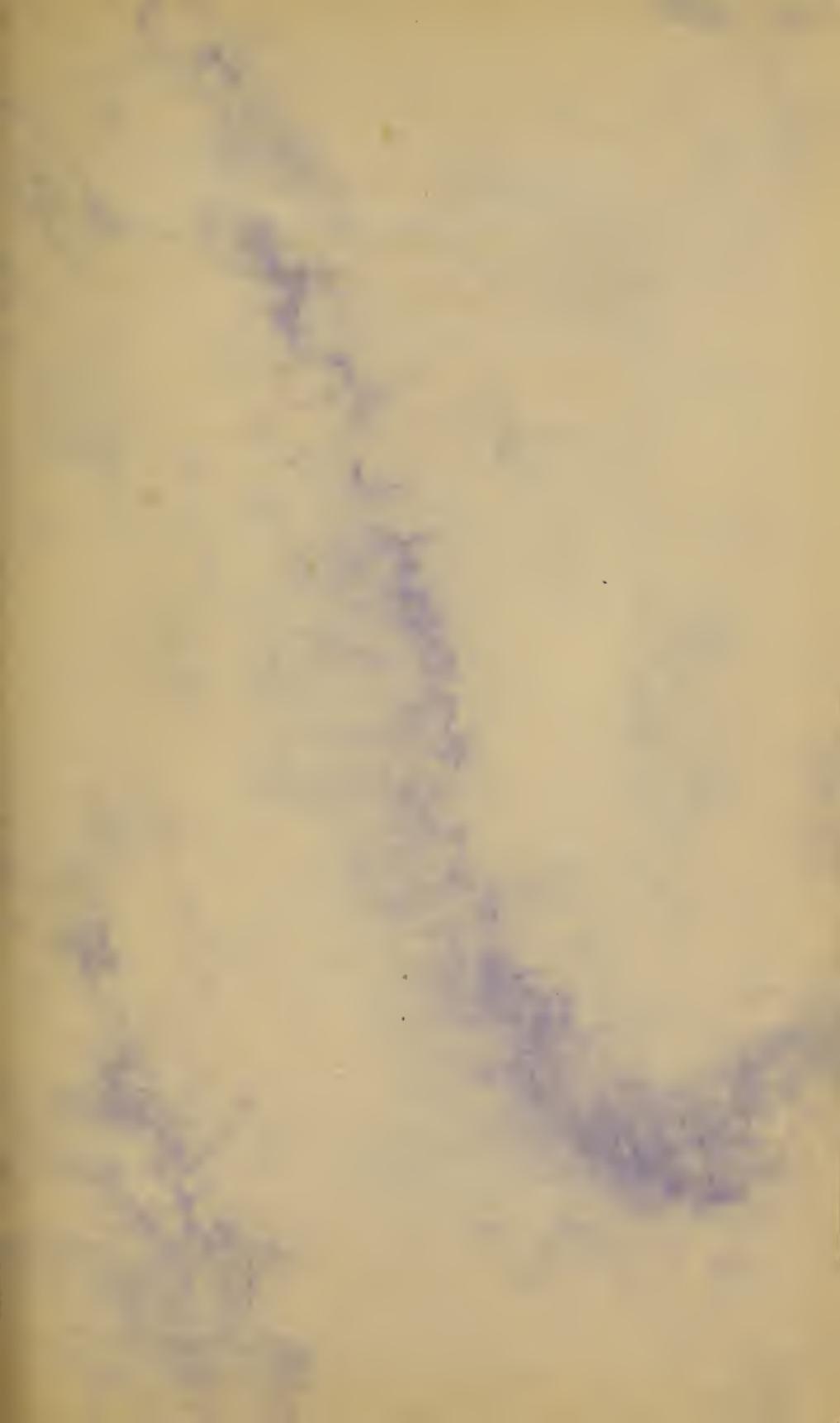
you were meeting the tests of your fellow students. I can see your busy father quickly sort over great piles of mail and instinctively pick out the envelope marked "Northampton"—the one letter in which he was really interested. He probably read it at the breakfast table. I can see your mother reading your letter again alone, with mingled feelings of loneliness and gladness but with a deep gratitude, also, for you and your maturing life. Doubtless they have come to visit you and have gone away, I feel sure, not knowing whether the difficulty of leaving you was greater than their deep sense of satisfaction at your achievements in the development of character and the cultivation of personality. These four years have put their mark on you, but your experience has been paralleled in the lives and hearts of those who have loved you with an everlasting love. Perhaps today you appreciate that love more than you ever have before. You understand now, in a measure, why they have expected so much of you.

In this beautiful relationship you

may find the full meaning of the message I have attempted to bring to you today. These hopes of your parents are a symbol of God's expectations for your life. We face today the astounding, overwhelming, thrilling fact that God himself has intense desires for each of you as his child. This is the glory, the fascination, the solemn promise of life. We need not be ashamed today if our hearts are full of joy and our eyes are full of tears. We have sensed the potentialities of being divine. It is a moment of supreme worth,—a moment fraught with infinite possibilities for all the beautiful years to come. My final wish for each of you is that you may have the courage to live your own life, that you may claim your place as a daughter in the great family of the Father, that you may know the joy and satisfaction of working with God, that you may help someone who is lost to find the way back to the Father's house. In a word, and I say it reverently, may you be divine! "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.

Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be."

May the Lord bless thee and keep thee,  
The Lord make his face to shine upon thee  
and be gracious unto thee,  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee  
and give thee peace.



*We are children of God, and if children  
then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs  
with Christ.*

B1  
4255

*HUMANUM CAPAX DIVINI*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 022 168 936 7